


# Enthusiasm Is a Starting Point for Better Health

Dr. Sandrine Talla is a general  practitioner in Cameroon. Courtesy of Dr. Sandrine Talla.

Individuals can make a big impact on the health of their communities by mobilizing groups to address specific issues. For example, if you believe that there should be more awareness of HIV/AIDS, you could organize a community health screening event. Dr. Sandrine Talla, a general practitioner and HIV/AIDS clinical manager at Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services, offers her advice to the YALI Network on how to mobilize community members and leaders around such events.

**Question:** What resources does one need to mobilize a community health screening?

**Talla:** I believe that the greatest resource to achieve anything in life is your enthusiasm and vision. After that, other things fall into place. These include:

- Human resources, that is, people who can serve as counselors and help perform the tests. A few volunteers with the same drive will do. HIV in Africa is still associated with a lot of stigma and a lot of misconceptions. People need to be properly counseled before and after they undergo an HIV screening test (this is called pre- and post-test counseling) and linked to care appropriately.
- Material resources, and that means posters for health education, screening test kits and other testing accessories. Sometimes, visual aids such as a computer, a projector or flip charts will help to enhance the presentation and improve audience understanding.
- Finally, you need financial resources for logistics.

**Q:** Tell the YALI Network more about the power of enthusiasm.

**Talla:** Enthusiasm helps you generate inner strength to move on even in the face of challenges. Enthusiasm is contagious. One's enthusiasm will provoke others to be interested in the work, and obstacles become steppingstones. This is what I meant by "other things falling in place." Some people may not support your vision, but with enough enthusiasm, you will be able to carry on.

**Q:** How do you win support from community leaders?

**Talla:** The first thing is to identify that there is a need for people to know their HIV status and to access medical care. Once this is done, it is always important to start with those around you, that is, friends and families who might support the work you are doing.

Then, identify the leaders of the community. Discussing these needs with the leaders first and engaging them in finding solutions will go a long way to stir up enthusiasm and support for your program.

My pastor at my local church first brought up the idea that I should educate church members about HIV/AIDS. Church leaders gave me a lot of encouragement and financial support that you need to

run such activities.

We always do the disease screening free, not only for HIV, but also for some other diseases, such as hepatitis, diabetes and others. When the service is free, more people will get tested.

I intend to launch into neighboring churches when I am back home after my fellowship.

**Q:** HIV/AIDS is a serious international problem, but what actions can individuals take to help their communities?

**Talla:** An individual can do a lot in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic:

- Get involved in educating the community about the disease, starting with families and friends, with emphasis on mode of transmission, prevention and treatment. Nelson Mandela reminded us that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
- Create a platform where myths and misconceptions about HIV can be corrected. Misconceptions around HIV/AIDS remain, especially in Africa. They prevent people from getting tested or even seeking care.
- Encourage parents to start sex education at home. It is still a taboo to discuss sex at the family level. This makes children get and act on wrong information, which they pick haphazardly.
- Advocate for formal education of the girl child.
- Empower the most vulnerable groups, such as women and girls.
- Organize HIV screening activities outside health care settings to do away with stigma of hospital-based testing.
- Show love and concern to those who are already sick.


*Dr. Talla is studying at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2014 as a Humphrey Fellow, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. As a Humphrey Fellow, Dr. Talla is focused on health policy improvement and coordination, monitoring and evaluation of health programs, and implementation of effective public health programs, specifically as they relate to HIV/AIDS.*

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## **Building skills in technology**

*“By building skills in technology creation, people can develop innovative solutions to community and economic problems and empower themselves to explore their full potential.”*

*- Regina Agyare*

A Tech Needs Girls volunteer conducts a  lesson in writing computer code with girls in Accra. Credit: R. Agyare

Software developer Regina Agyare believes Information Technology (IT) can drive significant social change. A 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow, Agyare helped launch the U.N.-related project Tech Needs Girls in Ghana. Her own company, Soronko Solutions, uses information technology to develop solutions allowing clients to reach their potential.

**YALI Network Question:** How does IT promote human potential?

**Agyare:** Technology is a tool and an enabler to help people take an idea or solution from inception to execution. IT can help your idea leapfrog infrastructure gaps and impact a large number of people. By building skills in technology creation, people can develop innovative solutions to community and economic problems and empower themselves to explore their full potential.

**Question:** Describe Soronko's efforts to pursue those goals with girls in Ghana.

**Agyare:** Ghanaian women and girls are lagging behind in developing IT skills. At Soronko we run a project called Tech Needs Girls, which is a mentorship program where we teach girls between the ages of 6 and 18 years old how to code and create with IT tools. The girls are trained by young female mentors who study science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in the university. They use a unique curriculum, which makes coding fun and allows for creativity and problem solving.

Some of the girls in these programs are from slum communities and could be forced into early marriage. By teaching them coding skills, we hope to help them empower themselves economically and continue their education.

**Q:** Have the newly trained girls been able to move into jobs?

**Agyare:** Tech Needs Girls alumnae are currently doing internships at the biggest software company in Ghana, called Rancard Solutions.

**Q:** What has Soronko Solutions accomplished in helping Ghanaian businesses better use technology to expand?

**Agyare:** At Soronko Solutions, we believe in using technology to help Ghanaian businesses grow and gain visibility. We have built services to help a wide range of clients automate processes to make business operations more efficient, increase turnover and bring their services to the customer's doorstep.

**Q:** How does someone begin to work with or for Soronko?

**Agyare:** It is very accessible to work with Soronko. We are always looking for young individuals who are passionate about using technology to drive small businesses or promote social change. We also offer internships and sponsor clubs in the university where we train young women in STEM fields and prepare them for the job market or starting their own business.

**Q:** Soronko is working like some corporate and nonprofit hubs in the larger IT community that launch further waves of innovation in the communities surrounding them. How does that work?

**Agyare:** Innovation hubs are very important because they provide the space, training, skills

development and inspiration to unlock the creative potential in our youth. They also allow for collaboration and for individuals with different skills and abilities to integrate their talents to solve community problems and develop themselves.

**Q:** What can YALI Network members do to start a hub in a community?

**Agyare:** The first thing would be to get a space to house hub activities. If one does not have access to a space, the next best thing is to create a virtual hub. That's an online community of people where knowledge is shared, innovation is encouraged and interactivity is expected. Hub members can meet regularly in open spaces or use community resources and spaces.

**Q:** Can their facilities also be meeting and networking spaces?

**Agyare:** Definitely, hub facilities can be meeting and networking spaces. It is actually important for the ecosystem and the success of hubs that meetings and networking among the members is encouraged.

**Q:** Are innovation hubs emerging in more places in Africa?

**Agyare:** Yes, and they are needed to address issues like Africa's huge unemployment problem and to engage young people to become innovative change-makers and problem solvers.

*Lukonga Lindunda, a Mandela Washington Fellowship alumus, provided [this interactive map](#) of innovation hubs around Africa. Read more about [Lindunda](#) and [BongoHive](#), the innovation hub he co-founded in Zambia.*

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## **South African Designer Makes Casual, Trendy Clothes with Military Look**

*"Love what you do. Having a passion for the business can go a long way when overcoming obstacles."*

Models wore LEGION fashions at a recent hip-hop  festival in KwaMakhutha Township, South Africa.

Credit: LEGION Fashions

**Fashion is a fickle industry, but a designer in KwaMakhutha Township, South Africa, has created an urban, casual and trendy look that she hopes will become fashion cool for young men.**

LEGION fashions is a menswear brand based in Durban, South Africa, owned by designer Nandipha Gaelesuwe, a member of the YALI Network. She is getting the company started as she completes a

degree in clothing at the Durban University of Technology.

## Could you describe your business to the YALI Network?

**Gaelesiwe:** LEGION produces men's garments with a military-influenced look, but with a design and fit that set them apart. My motto is "Camouflage is not only for combat." I want to produce designs that show the versatility of camouflage prints from traditional to modern. I also want a brand influenced by my own experience and by the urban hip-hop lifestyle.

## What is distinctive about LEGION products?

**Gaelesiwe:** The styling and cut of LEGION products are distinctive. The camouflage print represents the brand and sets it apart from other products on the market. The garments break away from a traditional loose fit. They have a tailored style that lies smooth against the body while still maintaining ease of movement.

The South African fashion market has very few locally produced and developed urban brands catering towards the hip-hop community. This is a growing sector in South Africa's entertainment industry, but most artists are wearing international brands. LEGION aims to promote a South African brand in the hip-hop community.

## How close are you to getting there?

**Gaelesiwe:** I've been finishing my degree, learning all the things that are going to help me achieve these goals.

LEGION started as a brand in 2013 with my output based on a custom-order for each client, but I plan to scale up the business soon. I need to find a space with greater production capacity, to give room to all the sewing equipment and workspace necessary. I'm also looking for textile companies that will serve as suppliers of fabric and will custom-design prints for me.

## You're doing online sales now. Do you plan to open a storefront?

**Gaelesiwe:** Currently, LEGION is selling through social media sites online and also personal selling methods. Future plans are to open storefronts in Durban and Johannesburg. Both of these cities are hubs to my market and are growing fashion capitals in South Africa.

## What obstacles have you faced in your startup, and how have you overcome them?

**Gaelesiwe:** I'm still dealing with these obstacles daily. The biggest issue is finding capital to finance the business. I do not have enough resources at the moment. I'm looking at different avenues of finance that might be available through government assistance and programmes for up-and-coming designers.

Marketing the business as a startup is also challenging. But I'm trying to be proactive, targeting local hip-hop artists to wear my clothing so that it can become more recognized. I'm also finding opportunities to showcase LEGION products at events like hip-hop festivals.


## What advice do you offer others wanting to start a business?

1. Love what you do. Having a passion for the business can go a long way when overcoming obstacles.
2. Make long-term goals.
3. Believe in yourself and be open to learn something new.

*(LEGION Communications Director Nkosinathi Mkhize, also a member of the YALI Network, contributed to this article.)*

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## Lessons for Aspiring Young Entrepreneurs

Photo Courtesy   
Sheena Lindahl

By: Sheena Lindahl, co-founder and CEO of [Empact](#)

*Join Sheena Lindahl for a Facebook #YALICHAT starting Tuesday, November 18. You can submit your questions until Thursday, November 20. Post your questions on Facebook or tweet your questions to @YALINetwork and include #YALICHAT. Tuesday-Thursday, November 18-20.*

Most entrepreneurs have few resources when they begin. They do not have a lot of money, experience, education or networks but they launch and grow their businesses anyway. I saw this firsthand in September when I met young entrepreneurs in Ghana. The challenges and experiences they described to me were not all the same as those faced by other entrepreneurs. I have learned that it no matter where you live, it is how people react to their challenges that makes all the difference in their success.

Sheena Lindahl with group of young   
entrepreneurs during her visit to the  
U.S. Embassy in Ghana. Photo courtesy  
Sheena Lindahl.

These are some tips I shared with aspiring Ghanaians:

**Break a big idea into a smaller idea to start.** Most people launching their first company do not have the funding or skills to start the next WhatsApp. I met an inspiring young entrepreneur in Tamale, Ghana, who was running a clothing store. He started with a single pair of sneakers — no store, no inventory, no funding — just one lone pair of sneakers. He sold those and used his profit to buy two more pairs. Then he branched out and included other products. He kept reinvesting his profits until he had enough to fund inventory, space and people to work for him. Starting small is

often far less risky and a more certain path to success than waiting for an investor.

**Tomorrow will not be a better day to start.** Many entrepreneurs wait for what they think are perfect conditions to start their businesses. Very rarely will the perfect time arrive. Instead, entrepreneurs get their businesses off the ground by taking action today to move forward. By taking even small actions they take control and make their own favorable conditions.

**Identify your assets and start from there.** Focus on what you do have and not what you don't. We worry about our assets, our ideas or what the critics might say. You cannot control someone else's actions or thoughts. You cannot control what challenges you're starting with.

**Focus your efforts on what you can control.** Entrepreneurs focus on what they can control. If you don't have money to launch, maybe you have a network of friends and family who will be your first customers. You may have an uncle who understands the process of exporting or a financially savvy aunt who can help you think through your plan. Your own skill set — whether it includes photography or carpentry — will also benefit your business. Networks and skills are assets as valuable as investment dollars. By focusing on what you do have and where you have control, you have all you need to take your first steps.


*Sheena is president and co-founder of Empact, an organization that has held events bringing top young entrepreneurs to college campuses, including the [Empact Showcase](#), a celebration of young entrepreneurs with recognition events held at the White House, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the United Nations.*

*The views and opinions expressed here belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the YALI Network or the U.S. government.*

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## [Girl Power and Protection, Now and Forever](#)

Even as a child in Zimbabwe, Nyaradzo Mashayamombe tried to defend and protect abused orphans. In secondary school, she saw boys bullying and mistreating girls and began to dream of a world where things could be different.

Nyaradzo Mashayamombe visits schools  regularly to talk to schoolchildren about

their role in preventing violence. (Photo  
Credit: N. Mashayamombe)

Describing herself as a born activist, Mashayamombe foresaw a time when boys would respect girls as much as themselves. Mashayamombe, a member of the YALI Network, also set her sights on bringing girls greater opportunities for education and achievement.


Mashayamombe celebrates the International Day of the Girl on October 11 with the knowledge that she has shared that dream with about 38,000 people across Zimbabwe through the organization she began in 2010, [Tag a Life International \(TaLI\)](#).

With financial support through U.S. Embassy Harare, the U.S. President's Plan for Emergency AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and Hivos, a Netherlands-based international development organization, Mashayamombe has started TaLI clubs in 76 schools. These chapters and their supporters work to reduce gender-based violence and to address the social circumstances that give rise to such violence. Reducing the occurrence of HIV infection among abused girls is another important objective.

The U.S. Embassy projects that its financial support for TaLI will allow the organization to reach 300 more schools with lessons of respect and opportunity over the next two years.

Even while TaLI supporters envision a time in Zimbabwe when children are never tormented and girls never abused, the organization works to provide resources to children who have already been victimized. TaLI provides medical attention, psychosocial counseling and other support services to abused children. The organization also works with law enforcement to help bring cases of abuse to justice.

"We want to see the government of Zimbabwe committing more resources to the issue of child protection," Mashayamombe said in a statement released in recognition of the Day of the Girl. "We also want to see well-resourced justice delivery system and a swift response to cases of abuse."

South African schoolgirls play a ball   
game. Ensuring  
that girls get educational opportunities will  
improve  
their entire future.

Reducing gender-based violence and promoting greater empowerment of girls and women is a cause with broad support across the YALI Network. Another network member wrote us about her work at [Sonke Gender Justice](#). This South Africa-based NGO works across Africa to strengthen government, civil society and citizen capacity to promote gender equality, prevent domestic and sexual violence, and reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS.

Itumeleng Komanyane writes that Sonke Gender Justice envisions a world in which men, women and children can enjoy equitable, healthy and happy relationships that contribute to the development of just and democratic societies.

Creating greater empowerment and opportunity for all is a key value of the Mandela Washington



Fellowship program. If you are a community leader involved with these important issues — like Mashayamombe and Komanyane — think about applying to become a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow. The application is open until November 5, 2014, so apply soon. Learn more [here](#).

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## To Achieve Equality, First Lady Wants to 'Shake Things Up'

Africa's future lies with women who run businesses, girls who attend university and "leaders like you," U.S. first lady Michelle Obama told young Africans attending the Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders Summit in Washington.

"Leadership is about creating new traditions that honor the dignity and humanity of every individual. Leadership is about empowering all of our people — men, women, boys and girls — to fulfill every last bit of their God-given potential," she said to the gathering of Africa's future leaders.

"When we commit to that kind of leadership across the globe, that is when we truly start making progress on girls' education. Because that's when families in small villages around the world will demand equal opportunities for their daughters. ... That's when countries will willingly and generously invest in sending their girls to school," she stated.

The first lady noted that girls who are educated earn higher wages, are more likely to stand up to discrimination and abuse, and have healthier children who are more likely to attend school themselves.

She recalled that while neither of her parents had gone to university, "they had the courage and foresight to push me to get the best education I could."

"That's what should drive us all — the hope of raising the next generation to be stronger, smarter and bolder than our generation. ... So many of you are already doing that."

Photo credit: AP Images



The first lady called on the men at the summit and others in the YALI Network to tell all the men they know "that a truly strong, powerful man isn't threatened by a strong, powerful woman. Instead, he is challenged by her, he is inspired by her, he is pleased to relate to her as an equal." She implored them "to keep modeling that behavior yourselves by promoting women in your companies, passing laws to empower women in your countries, and holding the same ambitious dreams for your daughters as you do for your sons."

She called on women at the summit and in YALI — some of whom may have disappointed their families by postponing marriage in order to get an education — to help others to do the same.

Obama told the group that when they face obstacles and resistance in their work goals to remember the words of the man for whom their fellowship is now named — the late South African leader Nelson Mandela:

“It always seems impossible until it is done.”

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## **The Women’s Luncheon at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit**

### **What is the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit?**

It’s the largest engagement a U.S. president has ever had with African leaders and governments. The [U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit](#) will bring together 50 heads of state, along with a range of U.S. and African civil society and business leaders, to discuss the future of Africa.

### **What issues will the Summit address?**

The summit leader sessions will focus on topics such as trade and investment, peace and regional stability, and good governance. The signature events will address issues such as civil society, women’s empowerment, global health, resilience and food security, and wildlife trafficking.

### **What will happen at the women’s empowerment event?**

During the *Investing in Women for Peace and Prosperity* signature event, [U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power](#) will host a panel discussion that will emphasize the importance of investing in women for peace and prosperity; highlight African governments’ effort to promote gender equality; and reaffirm African and U.S. commitments to advancing gender equality.

### **Why is this issue important to young African leaders?**

African women’s leadership and meaningful participation across sectors and generations are central to sustainable development in Africa. Women’s participation — in government, the economy, and society — accelerates economic growth, improves health and education, advances democratic governance and fosters peace and security.

When women have the same opportunities and access to resources as do men, the benefits extend beyond women themselves. As women work to strengthen their families and communities, they foster the education and health of the next generation, hasten economic growth and strengthen public and private institutions.

And when women succeed, nations succeed. In countries where women are empowered to participate and to lead, society is safer, more secure and more prosperous. That’s because women’s participation in and leadership of public and private institutions make these institutions more representative and more effective.

The United States is committed to supporting the efforts of its African partners and young African

leaders to expand women's and girls' access to health care, education, clean water and proper nutrition; and to promote women's full participation in society.

**Photo credit: MCC**

**What was the outcome of the Investing in Women, Peace and Prosperity Signature Event at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit?**

Jill Biden, wife of U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, opened the "Investing in Women for Peace and Prosperity" signature event at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, where the United States committed new assistance to [advance women's empowerment](#) in Africa. The support will bolster women's participation in peace building and in parliamentary campaigns, assist in the development or implementation of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, and help women entrepreneurs to launch or expand businesses.

The United States will provide technical support to strengthen African Union and national-level efforts to address barriers to the equal participation of women in the agricultural sector. Through [wPOWER](#) and working with the [Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves](#), it will provide grants to organizations that promote the role of women entrepreneurs in selling clean technologies and that scale-up programs to educate adolescent girls on clean-energy technologies. The United States also will provide increased assistance to the Inter-Parliamentary Union to build the capacity of African parliaments working to advance gender equality and to support parliamentary campaigns on specific gender-equality issues.

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